

The Classical Symphony – Form and Structure

Symphonies (and string quartets) are written in four movements.

1. Fast tempo (Sonata Allegro form)
2. Slow tempo (gentle, lyrical – typically ABA form or Theme and Variations)
3. Medium/Fast tempo – uses a dance form (Minuet or Scherzo)
4. Fast tempo (typically Rondo or Sonata Rondo form)

Sonata Form – The main form for first movements of symphonies, string quartets, concertos – music written in symphonic style.

- Set up as a dialogue between two contrasting themes (aggressive and passive).
- As the movement unfolds, the music shifts from stability to tension and back.
- Divided into several sections:
 - Introduction (optional) – slow, solemn; establishes home key.
 - Exposition – the themes are presented. (stability) Repeated.
 - Development – the themes are altered and manipulated. (tension/unrest)
 - Recapitulation – the themes return in their original form. (stability)
 - Coda – the very end of the movement – reinforces the original tonality and sense of stability.

General Outline of Sonata Form: (time moves from left to right)

SECTION: Introduction Exposition
EVENTS: **slow music** **Theme A / transition / Theme B / closing group :||**
TONALITY: *prep. tonic key* *tonic key* *new key (dom. or rel. major)*

SECTION: Development
EVENTS: **Theme A and/or B (fragmented) / re-transition**
TONALITY: *many different keys* *return to tonic*

SECTION: Recapitulation Coda
EVENTS: **Theme A / transition / Theme B / conclusion** **summary and conclusion**
TONALITY: *tonic key* *tonic key*

Example: Mozart, Symphony No. 40 in G Minor, K. 550, first movement.

<u>Measure #</u>	<u>Section</u>	<u>Event</u>
1	Exposition	Theme A – agitated rhythm (violins), g minor.
28		Transition – tonally unstable, moving to Bb Major.
44		Theme B – calmer, more lyrical melody, Bb Major
72		Closing Group – returns to A material / tonality to prepare for the repeat of the exposition (g minor)
101	Development	Theme A is fragmented and moved through many keys. “Intro,” mm. 101-104, to smooth the transition into the development.
160		Re-Transition – blends smoothly into recapitulation.
166	Recapitulation	Theme A (g minor) – 2 nd statement re-harmonized to stay in tonic key.
191		Transition – tonally unstable, stays in g minor.
227		Theme B (g minor)
260		Closing Group (g minor)
276	Coda	Theme A fragment is repeated to emphasize g minor.

Minuet and Trio – the Third Movement

- The Minuet was a style of aristocratic dance in triple meter. It was graceful and elegant, not fast.
- The third movement of many symphonies uses the Minuet or the faster Scherzo as the basis for its form.
- Contrast between the Minuet section and the Trio section (different tonality, new themes and mood).
- The overall structure of a Minuet and Trio form is “Rounded Binary” or ABA’ – the minuet section happens two times, with the trio in the middle. When the minuet is played the second time (after the da capo), all repeats are omitted.
- Both the Minuet section and the Trio section are a series of smaller, repeated phrase units.

General Outline of Minuet and Trio Form (time moves from left to right)

SECTION: Minuet (A)
EVENTS: **a a b b c c** (and so on – each theme repeated)
TONALITY: *tonic key (modulations possible)*

SECTION: Trio (B)
EVENTS: **x x y y z z** (and so on – each theme repeated)
TONALITY: *new key (dominant or rel. major; further modulations possible)*

SECTION: Minuet (A)
EVENTS: **a b c** (no repeats – each theme played only once)
TONALITY: *tonic key*

Example: Haydn, Symphony No. 6, “Le matin,” third movement (D Major)

<u>Section</u>	<u>Event</u>
Minuet (A)	a – violins, then flutes. D Major. a – repeated. b – oboes, then strings. D Major. b – repeated. Slows down at end.
Trio (B)	x – bassoons and harpsichord. d minor, faster tempo. x – repeated. y – bassoons and strings – longer, also contains x. F Major / d minor. y – repeated. Pause; da capo.
Minuet (A’)	a – D Major. b – slows down at the end.

Example: Mozart, *Eine Kleine Nachtmusik*, third movement:

Structure: Minuet: a, a, b, b || Trio: x, x, y, y || Minuet: a, b